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### Passing and policing

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## Abstract

This article examines the cinematic representation of passing men, focusing on the underlying theme of cis male fear and the resulting policing of borders: bodily, geographical, and social, employing queer theory (Butler; Halberstam) alongside the work of Foucault, to consider how power is articulated and policing is conducted in relation to the body and relationships. It commences with a reading trans tropes, before homing in on identity in relation to medium specificity to consider sight - the filmic gaze - alongside the sense of touch, then reading these aspects with the political reality of socio-economic position, queerness, crime, and location. It then pulls back to consider representation, appropriation and arthouse film and culture to offer an interjection that reflects not only on fantasy and the cinematic screen, but also political reality.

## Bio

Dr. Leanne Dawson is Lecturer in Film and German Studies at the University of Edinburgh. She has published on gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in German literature, theatre, and film and is currently working on a monograph, *From Girls in Uniform to Men in Drag: Queering Femininity on the German Screen*. As well as co-editing this special journal issue, she is Editorial Assistant of *Studies in European Cinema*.

Dr. Dawson's impact outside of the academy includes work as an expert on gender and sexuality in Film for BBC radio; academic consultancy for theatre, media, and advertising agencies; talks and workshops for cinemas and a range of LGBTQ groups; and co-organising of SQIFF, Scotland's first Queer International Film Festival (September 24-27\_2015, Glasgow). She is currently making a documentary about lesbian representation, based on her research.

## Keywords

Trans, passing, class, ethnicity, queer, US cinema, German cinema, Iran, lesbian.

**Passing and Policing:  
Controlling Compassion, Bodies and Boundaries in  
*Boys Don't Cry* and  
*Unveiled/Fremde Haut***

*Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce 1999) and *Fremde Haut/Unveiled* (Angelina Maccarone 2005), narrative feature films by lesbian independent filmmakers, follow 'passing' men who have also been read as enjoying lesbian sexual relations.<sup>i</sup> Academy Award-winning *Boys Don't Cry* by American Pierce is an adaptation of the true story of murdered Brandon Teena, who is presented in the film as a trans man, although, like the aforementioned lesbianism, this reading of Brandon as trans is not unproblematic.<sup>ii</sup> Key scenes from Pierce's film can be examined alongside German director Maccarone's *Unveiled* to consider how different types of trans masculinity are represented in Western patriarchal societies where white, heterosexual, cis men are intrinsically linked to power.<sup>iii</sup> Both protagonists suffer at the hands of cis men because of the supposed misalignment between their sex and gender and although this passes as an article on the cinematic representation of passing men, the underlying theme is fear and the resulting policing of borders: bodily, geographical, and social.

After outlining some key theoretical concepts from Queer Studies, alongside Michel Foucault's work on the development of Western systems of control, this article will consider how power is articulated and policing is conducted in relation to the body and relationships. This is done via a reading of trans tropes and some of the many similarities of the passing protagonists in Peirce and Maccarone's films, for *Unveiled* appears to build on the groundwork laid by *Boys Don't Cry*. This article then homes in on identity in relation to medium specificity to consider sight - the filmic gaze - alongside the sense of touch, before finally pulling back to read these aspects with the political reality of socio-economic position, queerness, crime, and location.

Passing and policing

Passing is the misrecognition of a person as a member of a sociological group other than their own and can apply to aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion or disability status.<sup>iv</sup> Critical and social understanding

of passing started with ethnicity: examples include light-skinned Black people posing as white in the racially-segregated USA and Jews passing as 'Aryan' in Nazi Germany to escape persecution. The term has since become increasingly linked to sexuality and gender: used as shorthand for passing as straight with regard to gay men and lesbians who wish to keep their sexual orientation private or simply choose to dress and act in a way that is often erroneously considered to be heterosexual. It is also used by transgender people as a strategy either to avoid negative attention or punishment for their supposed gender transgressions or out of a belief that they should be read externally in line with what they consider to be their internal gender identity.<sup>v</sup> By its very definition, when certain people 'pass', others 'fail' (Bernstein Sycamore 2006: 2) and it is those who either cannot or choose not to pass, and therefore present a disruptive surface text, who have been most celebrated in queer theory, despite the fact that failing to pass can have serious socio-political consequences. Furthermore, the sometime dismissal of passing in queer theory may fail to acknowledge its use as a means of infiltration and, possibly, covert power. While Brandon in *Boys Don't Cry* appears to strive to pass, ironically, because he is presented as believing he is a man, the passing in *Unveiled* is part of a more fluid gender display, apparently due to other external factors regarding the liminal space of (homo)sexuality and asylum.

There are temporal, cultural, and geographical 'norms' of gender and other aspects of identity, which are often incorrectly considered to be inherent or natural. Simone de Beauvoir examined the binary, which places the most powerful or normative identity in the first position, and relegates the other to second position e.g. subject-object, man-woman, Aryan-Jewish, white-black, and her seminal 1949 statement, 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (1997: 249) is an insight into gender as a process, a socialisation into such otherness, which inspired second-wave feminism in the 1970s. Seminal queer theory text, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Butler 1990) built on this to unsettle established notions of gender identity, subjectivity, and human agency by emphasising the body as discursive surface: gender performativity involves repetitive actions of movement, gesture, posture, labour, dress, production, interaction with objects, and the manipulation of space, giving the illusionary

appearance that gender is inherent. Butler uses the butch-femme lesbian couple to illuminate issues surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality, reflected in the ideas about passing earlier:

The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic repetition of 'the original' [...] reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original (1999: 41).

Butler stresses the political significance of displacing traditional heterosexual practices of masculinity and femininity from their supposedly natural home on the heterosexual couple's bodies to the lesbian couple's bodies, and rightly argues that not just lesbian, but all identities, must be challenged. She distinguishes performance in the more literal, theatrical sense from performativity, as the former is a 'bounded act' with a demarcated beginning and end (1993: 234), taking the aforementioned socio-political reality into consideration:

gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions. Indeed, the sight of the transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence (1988: 527).

The fact that the main characters in both films pass as men as part of their daily reality, rather than for entertainment, throws their respective environments into disarray, for gender intelligibility and unintelligibility are frequently linked to power – more so for intelligible masculinity - and powerlessness, respectively.<sup>vi</sup>

Language, too, plays a key role in identity, "The doctor who receives the child and pronounces – "It's a girl" – begins that long string of interpellations by which the girl is transitively girled' (Butler 1997: 49). For Butler, language is 'a performance with effects' (1997: 7) and 'to move out of the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject' (1997: 133), an issue which the trans characters in both films must navigate, as well as being significant off-screen with naming and labels so interwoven in the social fabric that divides were created between camps (trans, lesbian etc) who wish to appropriate and claim Brandon as one of them. Butler's work is deeply informed by Foucault, a scholar of historiography and archives of power, whose research examines the development of Western systems of control

that makes humans subjects and he goes beyond biology to consider the body as a manipulated and controlled object. In power relations, sexuality is one of the elements with the 'greatest instrumentality' (1998: 103), with non-normative sexuality frequently pathologised (1998: 105). Foucault outlines how sex/uality has been unspeakable, silenced (1998: 6), or that which must be confessed, to a religious leader or on the psychoanalyst's sofa (1998: 59), instances of testimony to powerful subjects who listen and say little, therefore knowing without revealing (Foucault 1998: 62). These also speak to subjects as a means of categorizing, regulating, and policing norms and behaviours, although Butler is less damning here, considering the positives for the subject of these confessions e.g. the religious follower feeling closer to God and the analysand resolving issues (2004: 164-165). Indeed Foucault singled out doctors, prison staff, priests, judges, and psychiatrists as key figures in political configurations involving domination. In order to instill discipline, the prison, the factory and suchlike provide enclosure and partitioning, assign rank, make a clear timetable and push for the correct use of the body ensuring it does not remain idle (Foucault 1991: 141-154), so the docile body of the factory worker and the prisoner follows routine and order (Foucault: 137-138). Furthermore, these institutions have traditionally been controlled by straight, white, cis men, and contained those on the second position of the binary, or outside of the supposed norm: criminals, people of colour, the poor, queers etc.

Aforementioned institutions such as the prison and the hospital employ medical and other examinations, transforming 'the economy of visibility into the exercise of power' (Foucault 1991: 184), and visibility is imperative, too, when considering the medium of film. Since Laura Mulvey's seminal article on scopophilia and film, in which she theorized that the spectator's 'gaze' is always 'male', regardless of gender, and woman onscreen is a spectacle of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (1975: 14) to be enjoyed by this 'male gaze', film scholars have theorized numerous gazes. Queer theorist Halberstam uses *Boys Don't Cry* to posit a trans gaze linked to queer temporality as, 'queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction' (2005: 1) and thus do not adhere to the linearity and repetition of a normative life schedule i.e. those

with 'queer' lifestyles, even if their gender and sexuality are hetero-normative, such as drug addicts and club kids who live life in 'rapid bursts' (Halberstam 2005: 4).<sup>vii</sup> Indeed Halberstam claims Peirce's film constructs 'a transgender gaze capable of seeing through the present to a future elsewhere' (2005: 7), beyond patriarchy's fixation on linearity and the binary.

In order to explore trans tropes in both films, some plot detail is necessary. In *Boys Don't Cry*, 21 year-old Brandon Teena (Hilary Swank), assigned female at birth, leaves his hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska after problems with male authority figures: the police, angry patriarchs, and other male family members of his ex-girlfriends.<sup>viii</sup> When he has to move out of his gay cousin Lonny's (Matt McGrath) trailer park home, he heads to a bar, where he meets a girl named Candace (Alicia Goranson) and accepts an invitation to a party in her hometown of Falls City.<sup>ix</sup> He creates a new life for himself there, sharing the limited leisure and social activities open to those portrayed as uneducated, uncultured and relatively poor, primarily involving alcohol, violence, and cars, while charming women, including Candace's sister Lana Tisdell (Chloë Sevigny), with whom he enters into a relationship.<sup>x</sup> His past, criminal and gender-related - both of which are heavily policed - catches up with him when his birth-name, Teena Brandon, is listed in a local newspaper in relation to one of his crimes. Although Brandon claims this is a typographical error, suspicions had already been aroused and he is humiliated, beaten, and raped by local men Tom (Brendan Sexton III) and John (Peter Sarsgaard), before being killed by the latter.

*Unveiled* (2005) follows Iranian Fariba Tabrizi (Jasmin Tabatabai), who flees to Germany because of homophobic treatment in her homeland, where she had been having an affair with a married woman. She claims asylum for 'political reasons', fearful of the officials' response to her same-sex relationship for she was mistreated by Iranian authorities in another example of the unethical policing of sexuality. She is housed in a closed reception centre at a German airport, where she befriends a man (Navíd Akhavan), who is fleeing their shared homeland due to repercussions from student political activity, and who is granted temporary asylum but commits suicide. With her asylum denied, Fariba secretly buries his

body and assumes his identity: Siamak Mustafai.<sup>xi</sup> Fariba, passing as Siamak, is transported to Sielmingen, Swabia where s/he shares a small bedroom with a man presented as foreign and works, illegally, in a Sauerkraut factory.<sup>xii</sup> A dare sees work colleague Anne (Anneke Kim Samau) ask Siamak out and their gentle friendship transforms into a lesbian relationship, passing as heterosexual to everyone else diegetically, with Siamak/Fariba's ethnic and cultural difference considered responsible for Fariba/Siamak's style of masculinity.

Their romantic relationship causes tension in the friendship group of factory workers, which includes Anne's ex-boyfriend, Uwe (Hinnerk Schönemann) who, along with his best friend Andi (Jens Münchow), visits Anne unannounced and finds Fariba in the kitchen in underwear. As in *Boys Don't Cry*, the cis men's discovery of the protagonist's secondary-sex characteristics which are marked as female leads to violence from them in a blurred combination of misogyny, jealousy, and, in *Unveiled*, xenophobia, which may be read as homophobia. Frightened by the altercation, Anne's son, Melvin (Leon Philipp Hofmann) telephones the police, Fariba attempts to flee, but is caught and sent back to Iran. On the plane, however, Fariba goes to the lavatory, destroys her official passport and takes another one from the sole of his/her boot, before removing the headscarf, somewhat doubling the film's opening, to reveal masculine attire, ultimately leaving the ending and Fariba/Siamak's gendered future open, which is in stark contrast to the finality of the passing man's death in Peirce's film.

Both *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled* feature characters assigned female at birth who, away from 'home', pass as men in poor, white, small-town environments, while simultaneously challenging patriarchal norms of gender, sexuality, and nation/ality, which use covert and/or overt violence to distinguish between in- and outside, and thus maintain the binary system, and other boundaries. Although the politics of bodily boundaries play a role in Maccarone's film, it is the im/penetrability of national borders that propels the plotline. *Unveiled* foregrounds (trans)nationality as well as (trans)gender issues alongside queer sexuality, while belonging and crossing in *Boys Don't Cry* relate to gender and home within the nation. Writing on *Unveiled*, Emily Jeremiah employs Nira Yuval-



Davis' argument, 'constructions of nationhood usually involve specific notions of both "manhood" and "womanhood"' (1997: 1). Fariba's Iranian background, coupled with her solid knowledge of German culture, certainly influence both gendered performances, while Brandon must display poor, rural Midwestern masculinity to be accepted by local men; indeed socio-economic position informs both protagonists' masculinity for gender does not operate in isolation, but rather intersects with class, ethnicity and other aspects of identity.

Before exploring overlapping themes and imagery, we must acknowledge the problem of examining both films alongside each other as *Boys Don't Cry* is based on the real-life murder of someone who is, in the media and this film, most frequently represented as a murdered trans man, while *Unveiled* is a work of fiction which appears to be about passing for political reasons. I read Peirce's film as representation, while acknowledging that this article adds to the archive surrounding Brandon Teena. *Boys Don't Cry* made the personal political and Brandon posthumously became the unofficial poster child for both trans men and LGBTQ movements more broadly - with some claiming Teena was a stone butch whose death was a lesbian hate crime, and others declaring he was 'someone who slipped between the cracks of available definitions' (Halberstam and Hale 1998: 284) - partly because of the widespread attention triggered by Peirce's film, which received numerous accolades including Hilary Swank's Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role in 2000. <sup>xiii</sup> <sup>xiv</sup> <sup>xv</sup> *Unveiled*, too, shows the bodily consequences of dominant discourses, making the political personal as legal decisions are played out on Fariba's ethnically-othered body. <sup>xvi</sup> Here, it is significant to note Peirce erased disabled Afro-American Philip DeVine, killed alongside Brandon, from her adaptation of the story, claiming the 'sub-plot' was too 'cumbersome' for *Boys Don't Cry* (Halberstam 2005: 91). DeVine had previously received filmic attention in *The Brandon Teena Story*, Susan Muska and Gréta Olafsdóttir's haunting 1998 documentary re-telling of the killings and subsequent trial. In contrast to this avoidance of 'cumbersome' otherness, *Unveiled* was made during a trend for both transcultural and -national film and a focus on hybridity, marginality, and otherness in post-reunification German cinema. <sup>xvii</sup>

### Unveiling Boys: trans tropes onscreen

Both trans films open with travelling protagonists and travel as a means of escape, rather than for work or leisure, is a recurring theme in *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled*. Both passing protagonists are introduced not only in transit, but also escaping from authority, which will play an increasingly significant role as both films progress. Links can be drawn between boundaries, crossings, and transgressions, so this section will examine crossing in relation to travel, then home in on crossing, sex, and gender, before considering the passing men's love interests and related transgressions.<sup>xviii</sup>

*Boys Don't Cry's* opening credits feature a police chase, for Brandon is initially speeding to impress Lana and his new friends, and then because he fears that if the police catch up with him, which they eventually do his identity will be exposed. A scene in *Unveiled* echoes this one as Fariba, passing as Siamak, travels in a speeding car with new girlfriend Anne and their friends, which, like Brandon and Lana's circle, includes a former boyfriend of the passing man's love interest, and awareness that a police check of papers will lead to the exposure of his/her identity and subsequent expulsion from Germany. Like the speeding scene in *Boys Don't Cry*, Siamak's papers are checked but, like Brandon, s/he avoids arrest and exposure for now, while highlighting the fear of being uncovered in both films. Transit is also foregrounded from the outset in *Unveiled*, which opens with Fariba, wearing a headscarf and dark sunglasses, fleeing her homeland by aeroplane. When an announcement in Farsi, her mother tongue, alerts passengers that they have left Iranian airspace, and women start to remove their veils, Fariba goes to the lavatory, removes and wets her headscarf, before covering the smoke alarm with the damp cloth to enjoy an illicit cigarette, escaping the cultural and religious policing of gender in her homeland and beyond.

Fariba's hair is foregrounded again later in the film: long-haired and unveiled, she disappears from her room at the holding centre immediately before she is to be sent back to Iran, then the film cuts to the back of a short-haired man, who we learn is Fariba, now passing as Siamak, as a female officer grants the latter asylum. Focus is placed on Brandon's hair too, with less visual impact, for Brandon is a

man from the film's outset and his transgenderism is presented as more rigid and essentialised than Fariba/Siamak's fluidity. Immediately after the speeding scene, *Boys Don't Cry* cuts to a trailer-park home as a disembodied voice repeats 'shorter', only to be told it is 'short enough', before showing Brandon examining himself in a mirror after a haircut by Lonny. Admiring his handiwork, Lonny says 'if you was a guy I might wanna fuck you' to which Brandon quick-wittedly responds, 'you mean if you was a guy', both asserting his masculinity and pointing to stereotypes of the effeminate gay man. This is also highlighted shortly afterwards when Lonny gives Brandon style advice about his cowboy hat and checked shirt for a date at the roller rink, with both outfit and location signaling rural, blue-collar Americana. Lonny's comment simultaneously emphasizes location, geographical and socio-economic, via the non-standard subject-verb agreement. In Michelle Cliff's work on passing, ethnicity, and sexuality she claims 'passing demands quiet. And from that quiet – silence' (1985: 22), and Brandon and Siamak certainly employ silence, or withhold information at times, to pass as men, but in the aforementioned instance language also betrays socio-economic position. Unlike queers Brandon and Lonny, Fariba/Siamak code-switches between Farsi, German, and English, with this and other 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986: 47) opening up the possibility of operating along a spectrum. Indeed *Unveiled's* opening and closing scenes, with Fariba on a plane, show greater movement than Brandon who is always firmly lodged in blue-collar America.

Underneath the gendering of the haircut, the biological body is highlighted during menstruation sequences in both films. Brandon discovers he is menstruating when he wakes in Falls City. He washes his jeans in Candace's bathroom sink before borrowing her car to drive to the local gas station where he steals feminine hygiene products—signaling both his relative poverty and his need to pass. Brandon's discomfort with his body is not only demonstrated via a shot of his facial profile, showing visible pain during tampon insertion, but also when he hides the applicator tubes under his mattress, which will eventually betray him when Candace searches his room. Despite biological sex being brought to the viewers' attention, the film's narrative frequently foregrounds Brandon's self-identity over the reality of his body, although the spectator has the privileged

position, in both films, of knowing about the protagonists' sexed bodies while those they encounter onscreen may or may not find out. Siamak/Fariba's own search for tampons does not demonstrate unease with biology, but rather a fear of deportation if this is uncovered. While hunting for feminine hygiene products in Anne's bathroom, s/he is asked by Melvin, who suddenly appears at a window, 'what are you doing with Mommy's tampons?'. Quick-wittedly, Fariba/Siamak responds that they are submarines. In contrast to Brandon's fearful and hasty washing of blood-soiled clothing in a bathroom sink, *Unveiled* cuts to a close-up of a sink filled with tampons floating in water in a humorous scene that makes Anne laugh as Melvin and Fariba/Siamak bond through play.

The bathroom is repeatedly highlighted as a site of difficulty for the trans subjects in both films and, according to Halberstam, the public lavatory is the archetypal place of gender policing (1998: 20). The bathroom at the Sauerkraut factory is an especially dangerous setting with the potential to expose Fariba/Siamak's biological sex and when s/he converses with Anne there, Uwe creeps up from behind, grabs his/her shoulder and pretends to be an official checking up on illegal workers. Here, the bathroom is a site of secrets, truth, and lies, although there are also positive occurrences. Fariba and the original Siamak's friendship began in the lavatory at the holding centre, where Fariba discloses the real reason s/he is seeking asylum, because of her sexuality, to both Siamak and the viewer. After Brandon is raped by Tom and John and is sent to the bathroom to 'get cleaned up', he uses the bathroom window to escape from his attackers. The bathroom is usually a relatively private space in which one is not observed but, for the trans subject, it is where sex and gender collide and, when under suspicion or surveillance, recalling Foucault, it becomes a place in which norms are policed and categories maintained.

It is not only genitalia associated with female-ness but also secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, which cause problems in both films as the clothed body's most visible sign of femaleness. Breast un/binding scenes expose the body of the trans protagonists and reveal to the unversed viewer how the flattened chest is achieved. In *Boys Don't Cry*, Brandon's breast binding occurs when he

prepares for his day alone. After the aforementioned tampon insertion, there is a cut to a towel on Brandon's bed, on which he arranges crotch padding including socks and the dildo used for packing, that is representing the bulge of the penis when clothed, and penetration of his lovers, with this plasticity somewhat counteracting the notion of the docile body. He binds his breasts with medical bandages, dons a white t-shirt and y-front underpants, arranges the prosthetic penis, styles his hair, then looks in the mirror and says 'I'm an asshole'. This flippant comment draws attention to the anus and may further queer Brandon when considered alongside the gay male sex alluded to in the earlier dialogue between Brandon and Lonny; when read alongside John, Tom and others labelling Brandon a 'faggot', an instance of name calling which may constitute the subject in a subordinate position (Butler 1997: 18); Tom and John later penetrating him anally; and when juxtaposed with the dildo, 'an equal opportunity accessory' that is "'queer" not because it is part of gay or lesbian sex but because it doesn't respect the distinctions of a hetero/homosexual dichotomy' (Reich 1999: 261). Aside from packing and binding, Brandon's dressing scene has many similarities to that of a cis man, highlighting that the cultural construction of masculinity does not require maleness and that all gender performativity requires preparation, 'tools', and props in order to perform it correctly (Butler 1999: 185), thus queering the notion of inherent gender. Although Brandon binds alone, an unbinding is later undertaken by a nurse after he is raped, and before it is implied he allows Lana to interact with his genitalia for the first time. *Unveiled* features two breast unbindings: the first happens when Fariba gets undressed at the holding centre in order to shower, nocturnally, so that her identity is not discovered, echoing Halberstam's 'bathroom problem'. However, in the second, she is not alone: Anne exposes Fariba's breasts, to herself and the viewer, before they make love for the first time. Anne's lack of surprise, coupled with her eagerness to interact with Fariba's body, implies that Fariba has 'come out' as a woman - or at least as a passing man - to Anne off-camera, demonstrating a fluidity of female sexuality as friendship becomes a lesbian relationship. Here, lesbianism is somewhat normalized, while *other* intersections of identity, such as ethnicity and class, are portrayed as responsible for negative difference.

It has been claimed that *Unveiled* only becomes a lesbian film in the context of distribution and reception (Lewis 2010: 432), but I argue that Fariba/Siamak's confession of a relationship with a married woman when passing as a man, her declaration of sexuality to Siamak, and the sex scene with Anne demonstrate this is not the case: *Unveiled* is a queer film open to both lesbian and trans readings. Indeed Fariba does not reject homosexuality as Brandon does. The sex scenes in both films after the respective love interests become aware that their partners were assigned female at birth are loving and tender, resorting to a somewhat second-wave feminist cliché of lesbianism and other forms of queerness as mutual, reciprocal and an escape from the power and violence of hetero-patriarchy. These scenes also show that the women previously presented as heterosexual, although they too may have been passing, are open to something new, something foreign, something queer, in which what they feel (emotionally and physically) is more important than what they see and what can be measured and categorized.

A motif of touch, the Hand of Fatima pendant is worn by Fariba/Siamak throughout *Unveiled*. It is usually donned for protection, as a sign of femininity, or as a nod to Arabian culture, while Lana points to religion with her dual cross pendants. When Anne notices the jewellery in the bathroom at work, the site of significant moments including gender policing and emotional bonding, and asks what it means, she likens Fariba/Siamak's hand to the female one represented in the pendant. After Brandon and John fight a man at a bar on the night they meet, John examines Brandon's hands for injury, commenting on how small they are, and in both films we witness the passing protagonists having their fingerprints taken for identification with the dossier of information used to make policing easier. Attention paid to digits uses the delicate hand as a metonym for the biologically female body, while also highlighting their *other* otherness, both ethnic (Fariba/Siamak and the Hand of Fatima) and socio-economic (Brandon and the fist fight).

Furthermore, penile penetration is repeatedly deemphasized via this focus on hands. When Anne reveals the scar from her caesarian section, Fariba, passing as

Siamak, asks if she can still *feel* it, to which Anne responds that no man has ever asked that before, implying they were more interested in penetrating her vagina, the Freudian bleeding wound of castration, than the abdominal scar resulting from penetration and childbirth. Fariba, a translator by profession, is repeatedly portrayed as more interested in language and touch than the aesthetic, and this command of several languages places a focus on the mouth area which, when read alongside the recurring hand motif, alludes to lesbian sex over penile penetration.<sup>xix</sup> Biological sex is clearly not of primary importance to Lana or Anne, positing their fluidity against the rigidity of the cis men in both films, who place a great deal of worth on sex, both intercourse and biological, and use these to gain control. *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled* show that life as a working-class woman with an intersection of identities that are located on the second position of the binary results in mistreatment and exploitation at the hands of cis men.

Lana and Anne demonstrate many similarities beyond wanting to escape their respective misogynistic small-town environments, for they take an interest in the outsider, are seemingly unhappy with their own lives, and are employed as manual labourers: Lana at the spinach-packing plant and Anne at the Sauerkraut factory. In their factories, *Boys Don't Cry's* Lana and *Unveiled's* Anna wear hygiene hats, tabards, and work shoes, presenting a femininity unlike the traditional glamour of the lead woman, that is the spectacle of '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey 1975: 14) to be consumed by the male gaze, with the exception of Lana's long red nails, which remain improbably immaculate throughout, and her brief time as an onstage spectacle, for both diegetic audience and the viewer, when singing karaoke.<sup>xx</sup> When Brandon shows a picture of Lana to Lonny, asking 'isn't she beautiful?', his cousin responds with 'if you like white trash'. Despite interactions between both Lana and Brandon and Anna and Fariba/Siamak being portrayed positively, the films, unfortunately, seem to indicate that the passing men enter into relationships with supposedly straight women because of the women's socio-economic location: poor, uneducated, and not traditionally beautiful/groomed enough - the latter also dependent on both time and money - to be with a 'real' man who treats them well.

### Touching moments: identity and the gaze

After highlighting trans tropes and the interplay between gender identity and biology in both films, it is now time to explore this apparent biological reality alongside fantasy, including the senses of sight and touch and how these are privileged differently by the cis men and the passing men's partners, respectively. Director Maccarone claims Anne's aforementioned unbinding of Fariba's breasts is not rendered dramatic onscreen in order to avoid clichés and prevent distancing between spectator and character, 'Anne falls in love with Siamak/Fariba. Her hesitation due to the fact she learns she actually fell in love with a woman seems petty when she is faced with the threat of Fariba's deportation'.<sup>xxi</sup> Indeed we only ever see Fariba and Anne make love as two women while passing as a heterosexual couple to everyone onscreen, unlike an inebriated Lana, who glimpses Brandon's cleavage as he, passing as a cis man, penetrates her with a (prosthetic) penis. The sequence continues with Lana paying close attention to Brandon's clothed penis and stroking his hairless chin. This, like all love-making scenes in the film, takes place outdoors in nature, escaping the aforementioned sites and institutions of patriarchal power highlighted by Foucault: the factory and the prison, as well as the home where Brandon is sexually assaulted. Somewhat problematizing this, Brandon's rape does, however, also occur outdoors.

When discussing the night with Candace and Kate (Alison Folland), Lana recounts being made love to by Brandon, before adding a fictional element: that they got naked and went swimming afterwards, making clear to the viewer that she is aware Brandon has breasts, but buys into Brandon's Butlerian fantasy. According to Butler:

Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings elsewhere home (2004: 29).

This fantasy of Brandon, in which Lana participates, not only to pass as a cisgender man in the present, but to re-imagine the past and fantasize about the future,



sometimes operates outside of the policing, control, discipline and institutions of heteropatriarchy, much like the relationship between Fariba/Siamak and Anne, and may point towards a heterotopia. Furthermore, the privileging of feeling (physical and emotional) over other senses opens up a spectrum of possibilities for both Anne and Lana.

It becomes clear that Lana not only challenges the limits of reality along with Brandon, but also wants to protect him, much like Anne protects Fariba/Siamak and becomes part of his/her fantasy in public. When Lana collects Brandon from the police station, he invents stories to explain why he is being held in a cell for women, beginning with a tale of overcrowding and progressing to one, which he vows is true, about being a 'hermaphrodite', evoking the intersex subject to whom Butler makes reference in her argument that sex is as constructed as gender and there are more than two sexes (2004: 66), but those born with both male and female sex organs or characteristics are operated on to fit into one of the two categories: male or female. Brandon, however, appears desperate when making such claims in the film, which adheres to a reading of the filmic representation of Brandon as a trans man. Brandon's employment of this excuse while behind bars is interesting because 'for a long time hermaphrodites were criminals [...] since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union' (Foucault 1998: 38). Lana responds to Brandon 'shut up, that's your business. I don't care if you're half monkey or half ape, I'm getting you out of here!'.<sup>xxii</sup> John and Lana's mother will eventually find *The Uninvited Dilemma* (Stuart: 1986), a book about trans identities, in Lana's room, showing she is much more knowing and accepting than her friends and family.

Fantasy occurs throughout *Unveiled*, too, and it has been argued that Maccarone's film challenges masculinist scopophilia by emphasizing touch (Jeremiah 2011: 588), thus replacing the need to see with the will to feel, in both senses. Foucault theorized the medical gaze which is used to diagnose the patient and 'embraces more than is said by the word "gaze" alone. It contains within a single structure different sensorial fields' of sight, touch, and hearing (1973: 164) and is 'bound up

with a certain silence' that enables the observer/clinician to listen (1973: 107). The relationships between the passing men and their respective love interests in both films are presented as somewhat removed from the power structures theorised by Foucault and foreground touch and feelings over sight and patriarchal logic, although not to categorise or diagnose as both the Foucaudian gaze and most other characters onscreen try to. Instead, for Lana and Anne, to feel (in both senses) is to know, which is positive for their respective relationships, while problematically adhering to the negative binary of women foregrounding emotion and men privileging logic. Indeed, the cis men are fixated on categories and measurement, although their employment in manual labour, or lack thereof, and socio-economic position disempowers them, on a larger scale at least, and instead they aim to control their social circle, rather than society at large. It is clear, however, that such cis men, alongside medical examiners, police officers, and immigration officials are invested in the medical gaze and the administrators of its validity.

While the foreign/strange skin of *Unveiled*'s original title evokes touch, its English name points towards another sense: sight, alongside cultural and religious connotations of the veil, and *Boys Don't Cry* is a declarative or an imperative on the gendered demonstration of feelings. In *Unveiled*'s speeding scene outlined earlier, Uwe watches Anne and Fariba/Siamak interact in the back of the car through the rear-view mirror, rather than focusing on the road ahead. He breaks hard and without warning, his response betraying his feelings - boys don't cry - while jolting the pair forward and juxtaposing his look with Anne and Fariba/Siamak's feelings, both emotional (mutual affection) and physical (the excitement, sexual and other, and the pain caused by the jolt). This recalls an earlier scene when Fariba is driven to the reception centre at Frankfurt airport by a white male official, who makes her feel awkward in an already uncomfortable situation when he adjusts his rear-view mirror to look at her, then readjusts it for a better view of her breasts. After initially meeting his look, she dons her sunglasses and focuses out of the window and, although she refuses to actively indulge his objectification, she neither visually nor verbally challenges this, knowing her future in Germany depends on being compliant. Here the look of the powerful (a white, male official) at the

relatively powerless (an asylum-seeking Iranian woman) may be combined with the Mulveyan cinematic gaze in order to gain pleasure from the sight of woman, with power exploited here to both sexualize and intimidate, although she is not presented as a feminine spectacle throughout.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Building on theories of the cinematic gaze, Halberstam claims that *Boys Don't Cry* relies on 'the successful solicitation of affect – whether it be revulsion, sympathy, or empathy –in order to give mainstream viewers access to a transgender gaze' and suggests that a 'relatively unknown actor pulls off the feat of credibly performing a gender at odds with the sexed body even after the body has been brutally exposed' (2005: 77). I argue that *Unveiled* also solicits viewer empathy through revulsion (the representation of the German cis men) and sympathy or empathy (for the foreigner and the queer). Halberstam's argument, based on queer temporality, states that Peirce's film constructs 'a transgender gaze capable of seeing through the present to a future elsewhere', helped by certain 'experimental moments in this otherwise brutally realistic film' in which the director creates 'slow-motion or double-speed time warps' (2005: 77). Although *Unveiled* neither engages in such film trickery, nor specifically attempts to invoke a transgender gaze as Fariba/Siamak is presented as fluid, a fantastic future is ever-present via the plotline and protagonist, who employs passing to build the life s/he wants, while helping Anne to envision a happier life elsewhere.<sup>xxiv</sup> When we:

'see' the transgender character, then, we are actually seeing cinematic time's sleight of hand. Visibility, under these circumstances, may be equated with jeopardy, danger, and exposure, and it often becomes necessary for the transgender character to disappear in order to remain viable. The transgender gaze becomes difficult to track because it depends on complex relations in time and space between seeing and not seeing, appearing and disappearing, knowing and not knowing (Halberstam 2005: 78).

This resonates, too, with Butlerian fantasy, Foucault's work on monitoring, examining, and classifying, as well as with theories of passing. Halberstam claims that the transgender gaze is achieved in order for the viewer to look *with* the transgender character, rather than *at* him (2005: 78). When John and Tom strip Brandon, as outlined shortly, Lana tells them she will have a look at his genitalia and report back. Instead, Brandon and Lana 'sit on a bed together, the camera

follows Lana's gaze out into the night sky, a utopian vision of an elsewhere into which she and Brandon long to escape' (2005: 87). Here, Lana remains part of Brandon's fantasy by avoiding the examination foregrounded by men in order to classify, where 'Sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit' (Foucault 1998: 83), and such cinematically fantastical shots contrast with both the gritty realism of the setting beyond the bedroom and the violent subject matter. The scene in which it is implied Lana interacts with Brandon's genitalia, however, is devoid of such trickery, aside from the cut between the start of their love-making and the post-sex cuddle, which is not fully in line with the transgender gaze, perhaps resulting in readings of this as an elided lesbian sex scene.<sup>xxv</sup>

The visual returns to the fore in *Unveiled* when Fariba has her mugshot taken, the onscreen photographic act highlighting her femaleness as she is recorded in pictures by members of authority, recalling the Foucauldian dossier of information kept on individuals, populations and suchlike, before the film cuts to an official donning gloves and Fariba bending over with a pained expression on her face as she undergoes an internal examination. This visual representation of discomfort as her vagina is violated recalls Brandon's facial expressions as he is penetrated by a tampon and, later, a penis during the harrowing rape. *Boys Don't Cry* also features a mugshot sequence in a uniformed, white, cis, male space of authority when Brandon is arrested and scrutinized simultaneously by onscreen officials, as well as both the diegetic photographic camera and the cinematic camera, and the viewers' gaze as we watch the final product filmed on the latter. Photographs are a source of concern for some trans subjects, for they may be part of the Foucauldian dossier of information and may reveal a differently gendered past. Indeed Siamak/Fariba burns a picture of her and her former lover, Shirin, in order to destroy evidence of a past life, while Brandon is keen to capture Lana on film to have a memento of his present one, but later burns photographs of himself after he is raped. In both films photographs are used to identify criminal misconduct and/or police national borders, but where border controls once focused on the visual image, via the passport or national identity card, border security is increasingly reliant upon biometrics, simplifying the identification of those who attempt to change their gender, style, or to pass. The events of 9/11

altered approaches to border security and, although unspoken, no doubt contribute to the fear of the foreign body, even beyond high security sites such as the airport, in *Unveiled*.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Returning to both the visual and the fantastic in *Boys Don't Cry*, John and Tom want to strip Brandon to reveal what they consider to be the 'truth', but Lana orders him to 'Button up your pants, don't show me anything! Think about it, I know you're a guy', based on what she felt, emotionally and physically, instead of what she saw, contributing to fantasy rather than adhering to the strict binary logic of the cisgender men. Her awareness of both binary and patriarchal logic, however, results in her stating, in the presence of the men, 'Mom, I seen him in full flesh, I seen it, I know he's a man', before her mother (Jeanetta Arnette) calls her a 'little liar'. The men take Brandon to the bathroom –\_problematic site\_– and, using linguistic and physical violence, pull down his trousers and underpants before Tom digitally penetrates his vagina. This aggressive 'examination', employing sight and touch, allows Tom to decide what kind of body Brandon has, whether it is monstrous or normalized (Foucault 1991: 184-187). Lana, her hands covering her eyes - with her touch once again used to de-emphasise the visual, at the moment Tom employs both touch and sight - has her face forced in front of Brandon's vagina but shouts 'Leave *him* alone! Leave *him* alone!'. Here, the bathroom is simultaneously a negative and a positive space, for it is where Brandon's assigned sex is unveiled, and where Lana's pronoun choice has the opposite effect of the investigatory or wounding words used by others in Brandon's life. This juxtaposition triggers somewhat of an out of body experience for Brandon, in slow-motion, as he watches himself with Lana, highlighting how pivotal it is that Lana still accepts *him* and buys into his fantasy even when confronted with the aesthetic reality of his biological body. Here, to speak is to reveal that Lana is part of Brandon's fantasy and language becomes a positive tool. The medical profession correlated the gaze and language, resting 'on the formidable postulate: that all that is *visible is expressible*, and that it is *wholly visible* because it is *wholly expressible*' (Foucault 1973: 115), but neither Brandon nor Lana buy into this, while Lana's mother will refer to Brandon as 'it', therefore dehumanising him, after her discovery of his assigned sex. Confusion had also

occurred earlier in the film when Brandon is referred to as both a 'fucking dyke' and a 'fucking faggot' by angry male family members of a woman he dated.

This sequence of events culminates in a brutal rape scene, in which John and Tom take turns to beat and penetrate Brandon, and it is implied that after this rape Lana interacts with Brandon's genitalia for the first time. Lana's sexual exploration may be said to echo Maccarone's argument, outlined earlier, that Fariba's biological sex seems a small matter to Anne when confronted with the idea Fariba will be deported and subjected to ill-treatment in her homeland and that the pair may never see each other again. It appears that the traumatic events at the hands of cis men make Brandon's biological sex even less relevant to Lana than it had been, while simultaneously becoming very relevant; she wants to interact with Brandon's body to make him 'feel' as good as he makes her feel, in a problematic scene that undermines Brandon's previous narrative. Indeed, Lana had previously told him 'I wanna touch you the way you touch me', to which Brandon replies, 'soon, I promise', with the futurity implying that he was not yet ready to be touched sexually.

This rape scene is also pivotal with regard to our reading of John, Tom, and their class, as well as John's mental state (Tom: 'doctors say he [John] got no impulse control' and Kate to Brandon and friends during one of John's previous outbursts: 'welcome to the psycho ward'), with the reference to the mental institution recalling Foucauldian systems of control. Furthermore, as Foucault outlines, punishment for crime in some of the Western world, although the Death Penalty still remains in several US states including Nebraska where Brandon was murdered, moved from the spectacle of torture often resulting in death with an audience - which echoes the cinema audience's love of looking - to torture within the privacy of an institution without an audience, to the supposedly more enlightened and humane discipline and punishment of the prison sentence, which was considered to be the middle ground between death and a light penalty (Foucault 1991: 115). These shifts changed the body-punishment relation by ensuring physical pain is no longer the constituent element of the penalty (Foucault 1991: 11). Criminality and possible incarceration are interwoven

throughout characters' lives in *Boys Don't Cry*, although John and Tom clearly opt for lawless (sexual) corporeal punishment for Brandon's gender 'crime', simultaneously creating a spectacle, for one watches while the other rapes him and then they switch, in order to penalize and regulate Brandon's supposed transgressions, resulting in their self-imposed death penalty as the ultimate punishment. The rape sequence is intercut with Brandon providing testimony to the police, recalling the Foulcauldian confession outlined earlier, while the male officer poses inappropriate questions and statements ('where did he try to pop it in first then?', 'I can't believe he [...] didn't stick his hand in you or his finger in you') ensuring the viewer has both a visual account of the rape accompanied by oral testimony, with our senses of sight and hearing both playing pivotal roles.

### Class, Community, Criminality

After considering the senses (sight, touch, hearing) and character perception, it is important to think more about the bigger picture and their location: geographical, temporal, and economic, and implications of these, such as socialization and political and cultural reality – for ethnicity and socio-economic position play a significant role in gender performativity - to explore violence and criminality alongside the fantasy of elsewhere to consider the power available to the socio-economically underprivileged.

As each film progresses violently, it becomes increasingly clear why Lana and Anne fall for the tender strangers, especially as both love interests had previously dated chauvinist and aggressive locals. Immediately after *Unveiled's* police chase, the women and Melvin are taken to the supposed safety of home by the police officers, although this home will be the site of brutal violence when Uwe and Andy uncover Siamak/Fariba's secret.<sup>xxvii</sup> This police intervention leaves Andy, Uwe and Siamak/Fariba to find their own way back in the car. Although the Iranian attempts to walk off from the German machos to take the bus, the latter force Siamak to accompany them to a local city. This city appears cosmopolitan when juxtaposed with the predominantly rural setting of the film, via Fariba/Siamak/the viewer's glimpses, through the car window, of a kebab shop

called 'Istanbul', an 'American Tabledance' strip club, and two men kissing openly on the street.

The trio's destination is a brothel, a site of financial/sexual transaction which, along with the mental institution, was long considered a place of tolerance for illegitimate sexualities (Foucault 1998: 4). It is in the brothel that Andy expresses his anxiety about his girlfriend, Sabine's (Nina Vorbrodt) disinterest in sex. Rather than comforting or reassuring his friend, Uwe alludes to his previous sexual contact with Sabine, stating that she was not like that when they were together. Andy responds with violence - again, boys don't cry - but Fariba/Siamak calms the situation down as s/he blames the problem on hormones, adding that s/he has a sister to justify this knowledge of the female body in the absence of medical expertise. In *Boys Don't Cry*, John similarly tries to stimulate Brandon's jealousy when he speaks of knowing Lana since she was very young ('the stories I could tell'), before adding that there is not 'a better man I could give her to than you' highlighting how women are regarded as 'objects of exchange' (Irigaray 1985: 170) to be made use of by the cis men with little other capital, economic, cultural, or otherwise (Bordieu 1986) in both films. After the discussion of Sabine's lack of interest in sex in *Unveiled*, Uwe pays a prostitute to have sex with 'our Mexican friend', further illuminating his ignorance and xenophobia, but the sex-worker, more astute than the men, notices that Fariba is female when they enter the private room and states she does not have sex with women. At Fariba/Siamak's request, they talk to pass the time and avoid arousing the men's suspicions.

Beyond the confines of the brothel, cis men in both films mistreat, make use of, and exchange women between them, often criminally, and women are sometimes complicit in this. After the rape in *Boys Don't Cry*, Lana's mother tells John 'if you did anything, or anything happened in that room, you get it cleaned up', to which he replies, 'if I wanted to rape somebody I got Mallory', making the gentleness of the passing protagonists especially attractive, because John's response about sexually assaulting the mother of his child is alarming.<sup>xxviii</sup> It is, then, hardly a surprise that the passing men are viewed by their girlfriends as a symbol of a much desired elsewhere, even before both Lana and Anne discover the assigned sex of



their respective boyfriends and buy into their fantasies.<sup>xxix</sup> Lana expresses her dislike of the small town of Falls City and, listening to Brandon recount the places he has been and is going to, unaware that this is both fiction and fantasy, decides to accompany him. These plans begin as a dreamy wish to visit Memphis, appearing to solidify when the couple prepares to leave for Brandon's hometown of Lincoln the day after the rape.<sup>xxx</sup> *Unveiled*, too, turns into a love story between a stranger and a woman dreaming of elsewhere; Anne shows an interest in Fariba's homeland and recounts how she had previously left her hometown when she was seventeen but had to return after she split up with her musician boyfriend. Fariba reassures her that she can leave again in the future, encouraging her to turn her dream into a reality, which is especially poignant as Fariba's own escape from home is not going as planned and her contact with Iran, via letter and telephone, is a highly fictionalized account of her life in Germany. Where the routine of the factory, much like the discipline of the prison, aims to produce 'subjected' and 'docile' bodies, which adhere to rules (Foucault 1991: 137-138), outside of the factory the working-class in both films aim to take control of their bodies via the undisciplined pleasure of alcohol and, in the case of Lana, drugs, as well as illicit sex, pointing to both queer temporality and fantasy.

Belonging is key within *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled*. Brandon and Fariba, passing as Siamak, display not only masculinity but the masculinity employed by the locals in their new hometowns, just as Fariba had presented the image of the veiled woman that was expected of her in Iran. Fariba/Siamak undertakes illicit work in the factory in order to earn money, placing the Iranian body into an incredibly German setting and her location among the production of a stereotypically German product highlights the constructedness of Germanness (Jeremiah 2011: 595) and of gender. Indeed constructions, and the policing, of gender depend on location: socio-economic; temporal; and national. This is highlighted by Fariba's removal of the veil when she leaves Iranian airspace, implying she wore it for cultural rather than religious reasons in her homeland. The veil is, however, a relatively common sight in German public space, primarily due to the high Turkish population: those guest workers who did not return to Turkey, but rather settled in Germany and sent for their families after helping to rebuild the country after

World War Two. For poor, white, uneducated Brandon, fitting in means acting more macho, but Fariba must perform Iranian masculinity in order to pass as such, while echoing just enough machismo of the German, low status, cis men to be accepted by factory colleagues. Fariba's plurality, in terms of language, location, employability, gender and so on, can be plotted against the singularity of Brandon, who speaks one language, never travels beyond his home state, and appears rigidly fixed on his masculinity, which flows between the gentlemanliness that ensures his success with women and a so-called 'white trash' masculinity in the presence of male friends in order to be read as a 'norm', although criminality pervades.

Peirce and Maccarone's films repeatedly demonstrate how difficult it is to be accepted within established communities as the stranger creates fear and distrust.<sup>xxx</sup> Jeremiah claims that *Unveiled* 'celebrates transnational exchange, suggesting that nations are not static and impenetrable' (2011: 588), although Fariba's arrival, request to remain in Germany, and subsequent deportation highlight how borders are rigidly maintained. Relatedly, Siamak/Fariba and Brandon's attempts to be included, at all costs, in small town communities, show the lengths the stranger must go to in order to be accepted in a homogeneous space. Significantly, both Brandon and Fariba undertake a reverse migration, for Brandon hails from the city of Lincoln, capital of Nebraska, with a population of 191,972 according to the 1990 Census, one of many ways Foucault argues that a population is monitored (1998: 25) with sex at the juncture between the body and population (Foucault 1998: 147), because of its reproductive function. Brandon makes his home for the majority of the film 70 miles away in the small town of Falls City (Lonny: 'that's not even on the map' and 'they hang faggots down there'), with a population of only 4769 residents during the same 1990 Census, recorded closest to the time the real-life Brandon actually lived there. Fariba is from Tehran and a dialogue between her and Anne reveals that the population is around ten million, which Anne compares to a city like New York, and this is rendered especially poignant as their conversation takes place while picking cabbages in a field located next to an airport runway; a rural setting with a constant visual and

aural reminder of the world beyond the boundaries of their lives and the borders of Germany.

Rural is key here as the North American term 'white trash' is a reference to 'actually existing white people living in (often rural) poverty', referring to 'a set of stereotypes and myths related to the social behaviors, intelligence, prejudices, and gender roles of poor whites' (Newitz and Wray 1996: 7). The juxtaposition of the terms 'white' and 'trash' is an interesting one, because white is usually considered the dominant norm, while trash is linked to the second position of the binary and to the abject: people of colour, the poor, the uneducated, queers, and suchlike. Although problematic, the term 'white trash' – along with its 'red neck' counterpart – is the only time that white people are racialised, for white is both the dominant norm and the default position on the white-black binary and whiteness is rendered visible when it intersects with another identity in the second position of the binary: poverty, but it is also important to remember that this whiteness and poverty, just like any and all intersections of identity, play a significant role in gender performativity.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Both *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled* contribute to the stereotypes and myths about poor white people, with the latter showing that elements of 'white trash' exist far beyond North American borders, for even Anne calls her social circle of friends/work colleagues and her ex-boyfriend 'pathetic hicks' and 'primitive', although it must be noted that these comments do not have the racial marker that 'white trash' has, but rather their 'hick' whiteness is illuminated when read alongside the cultured foreigner. Although 'white trash' implies most 'trash' is not white, and is therefore implicitly racist against people of colour, Anne's terminology does not explicitly draw a link between 'trash' and race or ethnicity. However, 'white trash', 'hick' and suchlike mark white people by their class and their apparent failure to live up to middle-class values and ideals and the notion of what white people *should* be.

Brandon and Fariba relocate to run-down areas of poverty, crime, and fragmented families, where alcohol consumption and car racing are the primary recreational

activities and the brutish pairs who taunt and punish Brandon and Fariba, respectively, display white trash characteristics. John and Tom appear to be unemployed small-time criminals, while the men in Germany are unskilled factory workers, signaling the coupling of an uneducated underclass with negative stereotypes of small-town mentality displayed in both films.

John wonders what Lana sees in Brandon, telling her 'he's kind of a wuss' and Halberstam argues that Brandon's masculinity, unlike the 'white trash' cis men in Falls City, is like that most often associated with 'middle-class values of self-restraint and courteousness' (2005: 65), despite his criminality. This courteous masculinity is certainly true with regard to educated, cultured Fariba/Siamak. Indeed, it is the outsider – a person of colour coupled with other forms of difference - who is educated and/or from a more desirable socio-economic location in both stories: queer Iranian Fariba in *Unveiled* and the murdered, disabled, Black student located among a group of white unemployed people and factory workers, erased from Peirce's translation of Brandon Teena's story.

Befitting of stereotypes of 'white trash' lives, it is criminality, alongside a violent queering of the romance genre, that drives the plotline of both *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled*. Closer inspection, however, indicates that criminal acts are also frequently undertaken in relation to protagonists' queerness: Fariba/Siamak disposes of a corpse, works illegally, commits fraud multiple times, steals a car, apparently in order to avoid persecution on the grounds of her sexuality. Likewise, Brandon commits fraud, as well as grand theft auto, before fleeing court dates that would register him both female and felon and possibly result in his incarceration, once again, in a cell for women. Indeed, this queerness, and/or ethnicity is portrayed as a reason for the passing protagonists' behavior in both films, without fully exploring what the 'white trash' cis men are scared of when Brandon and Siamak/Fariba enter their lives. Despite the passing protagonists' crimes and often questionable morals, they are repeatedly presented as likeable characters, for whom the viewer may have empathy due to the respective situations in which they find themselves.

The precariousness of Fariba's life in Iran was based on her practicing homosexuality, but in Germany it is both nationality and the fear of deportation that is problematic, highlighted when s/he jumps into a factory vat when workers' papers are being checked to ensure no 'Schwarzarbeit' (illegal work, literally translated as *black* work) is taking place. Brandon, on the other hand, is a legal citizen of the USA, who lives with the threat of expulsion and violence from natives in both his birth- and adopted hometowns, communities to which he ostensibly belongs, due to his trans status. It is, however, Brandon's criminal transgression that leads to the exposure of his biological sex and, although the locals frequently encourage lies and criminality when other outsiders, especially the authorities, are the victims of Brandon's behavior, his gender transgression sees him lie to the homogenous group who had accepted him, despite his outsider status. This makes them unsure not only of Brandon, but also of their own strictly binary logic, for the spectrum of possibilities that Brandon opens up profoundly disturbs their self-understanding and we see layers of policing, power, and authority come into play, both lawful and lawless.

John and Tom's use of the penis to regain control, via rape, does not work. Brandon's relationship with Lana remains intact and the couple form new plans, involving Brandon's hometown. Unsure of Brandon's past and confused by his present, the cis men determine Brandon's future; John resorts to the gun, a phallic symbol par excellence, to assert his power, killing Brandon. In *Unveiled*, graffiti on the shower block of the holding centre declares 'Kanaken ficken', while Tom in *Boys Don't Cry* undertakes graffiti ('Eat me Lincoln Nb'), as a leisure activity to express his anger and frustration. 'Kanaken', a derogatory word used in Germany for immigrants, especially Turks, shows how sex ('ficken' = fuck) relates to violence, physical and linguistic. While Brandon Teena is no 'Kanak', his otherness means that he too must be fucked, feminized, and rendered passive in order for white male locals to retain their dominance. The cis men in both films are, therefore, fixated on maintaining control. While white, cisgender, male authority figures, i.e. those subjects who are traditionally the most powerful, use the law and some of the aforementioned institutions and methods of discipline to control, the relatively powerless poor white men rely on the penis to try to reign supreme.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

While discussing the Brandon Teena archive, Halberstam declares American culture a 'wound culture' fascinated 'with murder and mayhem' (2005: 22), particularly in relation to gun crime. I would certainly add colonisation, slavery, and the aftermath, i.e. wounds from the US past, as well as 9/11 and the country as a prime target for terrorism, due to political policy and intervention overseas, to this. The notion of a 'wound culture' has, however, most frequently been used to theorise post-war Germany, a country affected by National Socialism, the Holocaust, and the subsequent division and re-unification. It is certainly significant that both filmic tales of people with bodies assigned female at birth who are passing as men and who suffer brutality at the hands of cis men are set in countries so tightly bound up with horrific patriarchal violence and white dominance. These are countries where passing was employed by Black people, Jews, homosexuals, and others, where success was a matter of life or death. Indeed violence is a continual threat during both films, repeatedly used to police gender, sexuality, and nation.

Reading both *Boys Don't Cry* and *Unveiled* alongside each other allows the plurality of masculinity and the spectrum of sexuality beyond the strictly policed dyad to be highlighted, while showing that these independent films by lesbian directors have a strong bias towards the queer other. Heterosexual, white, biological male masculinity, the meeting of those parts of identity representing power, dominance, and patriarchy, which are found on the first position of the binary, is represented as negative throughout both films. However, it is the juxtaposition of these markers of power with relative poverty that renders some characters' behaviour truly abhorrent. Although both Tom and John, and Uwe and Andi, have aspects of identity that are considered powerful, they often feel powerless because of their socio-economic position, which also appears to mean they have not been socialized or educated to express themselves positively (boys don't cry, especially not blue collar or 'white trash' boys), resulting in excessive displays of machismo. Furthermore, poverty is frequently linked to substance abuse and violence in both German and U.S. culture, while a low socio-economic status can result in a lack of

education and limited access to culture. So, in both films, it is not white, male masculinity that is demonized, but *poor*, white, male masculinity.

While otherness, including trans identity, queerness, and people of colour, is shown to be positive, both films adhere to tired stereotypes of small-town life and the poor. This ensures that at least one binary is firmly in place as viewers of these female-directed, queer, independent films are frequently assumed to belong to a certain demographic: an arthouse audience higher up the socio-economic ladder, cultured, educated, and/or queer. We are, perhaps, supposed to understand, even empathise with, the passing men's crimes, while the poor cis men are presented as abhorrent with no room to understand the background to their horrendous transgressions. Character presentation appears to show the passing protagonists, Brandon and Siamak/Fariba, the gentle (trans)man and the multi-lingual foreigner, alienated by much of the 'white trash' behaviour of their surroundings but having to partake in some of this to fit into the community and survive. This presentation allows the viewer to prioritise Butlerian fantasy over biology and aesthetics in order to escape from the discomfort of aggressive, uncultured, 'white trash'. Here, Foucauldian classification and measurement comes into play, for the arthouse viewer may take the distanced role, much like that of the psychoanalyst or the prison warden, of seeing and knowing (without disclosing), with both this and Halberstam's 'trans gaze' unlike the types of suture and/or desire theorized by scholars working within Film Studies (Mulvey; Neale; Doane; de Lauretis; Stacey etc). Although both narratives encourage the audience to take the side of the passing protagonists, alienated by the 'white trash' of their surroundings, it could be argued that Fariba survives not only because she is educated, but because her passing is presented as a means to an end, leading us to question if Brandon was punished onscreen not only for being trans, but also for his lack of education, and his socio-economic situation. Brandon, unlike Fariba, is trapped in a world of 'white trash' violence, as his temporal (pre-internet) and socio-economic (lack of tertiary education) position means his knowledge was limited, making a way out very difficult. Here, gender metamorphosis in terms of the spectrum is used as a metaphor for other kinds of im/mobility. So, it seems as if certain types of otherness are (temporarily) rendered more acceptable via the negative

exploitation of other intersections of their identity also found in the second position of the dyad, including poverty, lack of education, and limited access to (high) culture.

If this is the case, then it is only ethical to ask whether arthouse entertainment is being sought at the expense of those – the poor, the ‘uncultured’ - for whom the independent cinema is often an inappropriate/unappropriated space, a theme I intend to investigate in future research on socio-economic position, queer culture, art-house cinema, and wellbeing. Those of us raised in relative poverty without a gateway to ‘high culture’ are taught we should not appropriate certain spaces as our dialects are out of place and, if class is read on the body, our white, or other, ‘trash’ may prevent us from passing, meaning we fail to fit in such spaces. While the LGB subject is becoming normalized (gay marriage, adoption etc.), and trans rights are being fought for, class continues to be treated criminally, for the poor continue to be demonized, onscreen and off, by those in a ‘higher’ socio-economic position. The arthouse cinema and other cultural venues are to class as the bathroom is to gender: a site of policing and potential anxiety for those who do not or cannot pass.

I would issue a call to arms, but readers of an academic journal on European cinema is not the best audience. However, we, as academics, need to think about how we treat the poor not only in the films we watch and analyse or when considering Widening Participation for those less privileged, but also – particularly significant in these times of foregrounding knowledge exchange and impact – when we organise events and when we pick apart the lives of characters onscreen while seated alongside other privileged people in high culture venues or in academic journals to be read almost exclusively by the educated and cultured. We should, instead, look towards a heterotopia, which would signal political change, which may start with the fantasy of a world we can imagine as different.

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<sup>i</sup> Peirce’s body of work includes directing ‘Lifeline’ (2006), an episode of ground-breaking North American lesbian show, *The L-Word*. Indeed several queer and lesbian independent filmmakers, such as Rose Troche and Jamie Babbit, have directed episodes of *The L-Word* and a range of other US television series. Peirce’s most recent big screen project is the 2013 remake of Stephen King’s *Carrie*. Maccarone directed lesbian film *Everything Will Be Fine/Alles wird Gut* (1998) a tale of



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mixed-race lesbian love, and *Hounded/Verfolgt* (2006), a sado-masochistic tale about a sixteen-year-old and his married probation officer.

<sup>ii</sup> Throughout this article I use trans, rather than trans\*. Although the asterisk is used by some for reasons including: making trans men visible when it was claimed that trans women were being foregrounded; the asterisk highlighting a spectrum of identities under the trans umbrella, such as non-binary trans identities; demonstrating a difference between trans as a shortened version of transsexual and trans from transgender; and to include cis people who do not fit traditional gender roles. However, these ideas have been variously critiqued within some parts of the trans community and my use of asterisk-free trans is intended as an inclusive umbrella term.

<sup>iii</sup> I use cis to refer to those whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex i.e. those who are not transgender.

<sup>iv</sup> Much of my work focuses on the question of passing, in which I am personally invested e.g. as a lesbian who passes for straight and as woman with an undeniably working-class background, who has been encouraged to pass as middle-class in the academy and who now not only appropriates, but also organizes and leads events in, middle-class arthouse spaces such as the independent cinema.

<sup>v</sup> There are also numerous critiques of passing within transgender communities too. See both Carlson (2013) and Serano (2013) as starting points.

<sup>vi</sup> I examine passing in relation to both vampirism and the femme in theatre, therefore the onstage performance, in Elfriede Jelinek's play *Illness or Modern Women/Krankheit oder Moderne Frauen* (Dawson 2010)

<sup>vii</sup> Many scholars have argued that oppressed and marginalized groups—queers, people of colour, the working class - disrupt liberal notions of time (Halberstam, 2003; Bhaba, 1994; Edelman 2004 etc.).

<sup>viii</sup> Usually 'one is dependent upon another for one's name, for the designation that is supposed to confer singularity' (Butler 1997: 29), but Brandon inverted his given and family name. Upon his first meeting with Candace in the bar, she tells him she hates her name and is thinking of changing it, to which he replies knowingly, 'sometimes that helps' and, previously, he had introduced himself as Bailey to his date, Nicole at the roller rink.

<sup>ix</sup> There are no gay bars or LGBTQ-specific spaces in either film.

<sup>x</sup> Seignyn's screen debut in Larry Clark's *Kids* (1995) saw her contract HIV through underage sex, and she went on to play numerous roles linked to non-normative sexual behaviour and relationships, including TV show *Big Love* (2006-2011), about a polyamorous Mormon family, as well as scandalous heterosexuality in *The Brown Bunny* (Vincent Gallo, 2003), in which she performs unsimulated fellatio. Seignyn plays a butch lesbian shunned by the second-wave feminist friends of her femme partner in the second segment of *If These Walls Could Talk 2* (Martha Coolidge, 2000).

<sup>xi</sup> Throughout this article I use the masculine pronoun for Brandon Teena, who is presented as self-identifying as a man in the film, while my pronoun usage for Fariba/Siamak is less rigid, befitting the way the character moves between genders.

<sup>xii</sup> Swabia is a cultural, historic and linguistic region in southwestern Germany. As a cultural region, Swabia's borders are not clearly defined, although it is currently considered to comprise the former German state of Württemberg and the administrative region of Bavarian Swabia. This flexibility with regard to Swabian boundaries is pertinent in a film revolving around the im/penetrability of borders.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Unveiled* received several lesser-known awards, all in 2005, including the Hessian Best Feature Film Award, the Great Jury Prize at the Image Nation Film Festival in Montreal, and Best Narrative Feature at the Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival. Furthermore, it was unofficially endorsed by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, whose mini-documentary, *Everyone, Everywhere* (Renée Rosenfeld, 2004) appears as an additional feature on the US DVD version of *Unveiled*.

<sup>xiv</sup> Trans activists and academics have critiqued the casting of cis women to represent trans men and vice versa, as it could be viewed as a way of framing trans identities as, for example, women simply dressing as men.

<sup>xv</sup> For a starting point on further discussion about the real Brandon Teena's identity, see both Halberstam and Hale (1998) and Hale (1998).

- <sup>xvi</sup> The murders of Brandon Teena in 1993, Matthew Shephard, a young gay man who was tortured and killed in Wyoming in October 1998, and Gwen Araujo, who was claimed to be a pre-operative transsexual woman killed by four men in Newark, California in October 2002, brought international attention to homo- and trans-phobic hate crimes in the United States of America.
- <sup>xvii</sup> The USA and Germany have a long history of cinematic collaboration and it is well known that both the film of Weimar Germany and the filmmakers who moved to the US to flee the National Socialist regime profoundly influenced Hollywood and beyond. Furthermore, New German Cinema of the 1970s and 80s, spearheaded by bisexual *enfant terrible* Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who pushed boundaries with his provocative onscreen representation of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, would go on to inspire New Queer Cinema filmmakers in North America in the 1990s, a movement to which Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry* is said to both belong and signal the end of, due to its Academy Award win and mainstream popularity. New Queer Cinema's hybrid identities and risqué subject matters, then, appear to have created a springboard for both German filmmakers and foreigners making film in Germany, in keeping with the post-reunification transcultural and -national trend, to continue to blur borders and boundaries. Notable queer examples include Kutluğ Ataman's *Lola+Bildikid* (1999), which features a plethora of bilingual Turkish-German trans subjects, drag queens, and rent boys indulging in homosexual acts but denying a non-heterosexual identity, as well as Max Färberböck's *Aimée & Jaguar* (1999) about a Jewish lesbian passing as gentile and the fluid sexualities of the women she associates with. See Dawson (2012) for further discussion of queerness in this film. More recently, Christian Petzold (2005), Fatih Akin (2007), and Monika Treut (2009) have made films with queer characters from Germany and beyond, who appear to return from beyond the grave, pushing the limits of otherness even further, and I am currently working on a research project based on this. For more information on hybridity and otherness in Monika Treut's cinematic oeuvre, see Dawson and Treut (2014).
- <sup>xviii</sup> In *Boys Don't Cry*, the road defines the space between town and countryside, while *Unveiled* works on both a local and a larger scale, using airspace to demarcate countries and cultures.
- <sup>xix</sup> Language, a synthetic range of signs used to signify both objects and abstract notions, is as prosthetic as the dildo Brandon dons, although it is through language that subjects are both defined within, and make sense of, the world. Fariba's command of the German language shows both a greater grasp of grammar and broader vocabulary than that of some native German men in authority, as demonstrated when she gives a German official the answer to a crossword puzzle, and must also help him with the spelling of the poet's name.
- <sup>xx</sup> In *Unveiled* it is Fariba, passing as Siamak, who sings for others, although this is offstage in the bowling alley.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Maccarone makes this claim in a 2005 interview, conducted by Swarz and accessed on the After Ellen website on 24 July 2014.
- <sup>xxii</sup> See Butler (2004: 142-144) for a discussion of fantasy in *Boys Don't Cry*.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> For further exploration of woman onscreen in the Iranian context, see Mottahdeh (2004).
- <sup>xxiv</sup> This can be considered alongside the 'white trash' lifestyle's lack of futurity. For further discussion about minorities, otherness, the disadvantaged and futurity, see Bhabha (1994), Edelman (2004), and Dillon (2013).
- <sup>xxv</sup> While the trans men long for a brighter future, cis men often fixate on the past in both films, including previous relationships with Anne and Lana. Fariba/Siamak's foreign roommate couples his nostalgia with the visual as he watches videos of his home village on repeat, unable to live in the present. While this likely reflects his precarious status as outsider or other in Germany, nostalgia is frequently associated with the country due to the series of ruptures throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century (the Holocaust; division; re-unification) and resulting trauma.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Fremde Haut*, with its post-9/11 release date, highlights how the foreigner is policed. Where the veiled woman was once viewed as anti-feminist, much discourse around the headscarf and Islam is now anti-terrorist.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> The German term 'Heim' or 'home', from which we have words such as 'heimlich' (secretly) and 'unheimlich' (uncanny), is significant here, for both Brandon and Fariba/Siamak live lives in which the revelation of their secrets leads to violence in the home, which should be a safe space, and their likeness to cis-men certainly is uncanny throughout both films.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Furthermore, his interaction with his pre-school daughter, April is repeatedly displayed as verbally and physically abusive - John forces her to drink beer then screams at her when she accidentally urinates on his lap - while also hinting at sexual abuse. According to Foucault, 'if one considers the threshold of all culture to be prohibited incest, then sexuality has been, from the dawn of time, under the sway of law and right' (1998: 109-110), simultaneously showing how

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patriarchal power structures penetrate the private sphere and that the poor, cis men try to create their own rules, usually to the detriment of women and others on the second position of the binary, in order to feel powerful.

<sup>xxix</sup> Those who are attracted to and/or date trans subjects may be labelled transsensual, although trans status is not fetishized by Lana or Anne.

<sup>xxx</sup> Brandon's murder later that evening prevents this move from happening, but white lettering at the end of the film makes clear that Lana did, indeed, leave Falls City, but later returned to raise her child there.

<sup>xxxi</sup> From personal experience, I frequently found myself silenced in 'high' cultural spaces (to speak is to reveal). Indeed I spent several of my student years actively avoiding arthouse cinemas, despite studying – and being a huge fan of – French and German cinema, from undergraduate level onwards, because of my relatively poor working-class background.

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